

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# All the Year Round

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY  
**CHARLES DICKENS.**

No. 36.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1889. PRICE TWOPENCE.

## KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

BY ESMÈ STUART.

*Author of "Muriel's Marriage," "Joan Vellacot,"  
"A Faïe Damzell," etc., etc.*

### CHAPTER I. RUSHBROOK HOUSE.

IT would be very difficult to say at which time of the year the country about Rushbrook Beacon shows to most advantage. Beautiful it always is, this high moorland, which Nature has enriched with every colour that can most please the eye and send immeasurable joy into a heart that loves beauty. This Beacon is the highest land in Southshire, and one can look round on every side and see a wondrous diversity of views; from the south, where blue undulating hills speak of pastures on sunny slopes, to the north, where the long, stern ridge of heathy moor, marked out by solitary fir clumps, makes one realise the silent majesty of uncultivated lands, through which man has ventured on no other sign of his cunning than by making the broad, sandy high-road, where formerly the heavy coach rolled on towards the sea-coast, but where now picturesque country waggons crawl happily along, scorning the bare idea of the steam monster that has almost swallowed up all the carriers' carts of the more inhabited neighbourhoods.

The high ridges of the moorland, or forest, as it is called, sweep away from the north to the west. On the east, as we stand on the Beacon, we can forget the grand desolation behind us, and, in our milder moods, we may feel glad that here the character of the land has nothing rugged about it; that the great sea of heather has been forbidden to advance;

and that, amidst green meadows and gentle undulations rising one behind the other, friendly windmills stretch out their four arms, courting the winds and gaily racing through their morning's work, making music among the sails.

The Beacon has about a mile of almost flat land on its summit, and gradually slopes down on the north-west side to a beautiful valley, at the head of which stands Rushbrook House. Once it had been connected with a water-mill; but the grinding of the latter had ceased long ago, and Nature and art had contrived to render this spot one of the most lovely in the country; for the forest land had collected its trickling streams and had formed along the valley four exquisite pools, and these were edged with luxuriant trees of every description, coming sometimes close to the edge, sometimes climbing up steep hills on either side.

The village of Rushbrook lay scattered about on the top of the Beacon, where only one big house was to be seen. It was named "The Observatory," because this circular building had been added to a large and not very picturesque modern dwelling. Here lived Lord Cartmel, though he was chiefly to be found in the observatory chamber, star-gazing or poring over astronomical books. His only son, the Honourable Walter Akister, was a barrister, and had chambers in the Temple; but oftenest he might be seen at Rushbrook, and, like Ceelebs, he was said to be in search of a wife. His sister Betta, who was plain, shy, and aristocratic, spent her time in trying to fit the ways of her father and her brother into the puzzle of daily life.

Below the village lay the hamlet of Rushbrook Mills, where was situated the

very picturesque Rushbrook House. Here lived Mr. Josiah Kestell, his wife, and two daughters. He had bought the place from Mr. Eagle Bennison, the Squire, who owned miles of the forest land, which, though beautiful, was not exactly productive, so that the large sum offered to him by "Kestell of Greystone," as the lawyer had long been known, induced him to sell the old mill-house and a few acres of land, including the first of the pools, to the successful solicitor.

The Squire's own house was situated at the other end of the valley, and above the last of the pools. It was known as Court Garden, and was reached by a road that was parallel with the water, then, crossing an old bridge, ran between fir-wood and steep inclines up to the Squire's abode, from whence one looked down on the leafy maze below and far away to the northern ridge of forest before mentioned.

It was often a subject of discussion whether Rushbrook House, with its exquisite picturesqueness; its tall, grey-arched bridge, spanning the head of the valley and acting as a kind of drawbridge to the house; its beautiful pool in front, where the wild-fowl and the moorhens fluttered; its overhanging trees and all its other charms; surpassed the wider views and the larch and fir plantations of Court Garden.

Both houses were, so it appeared, far from the busy haunts of men, for there was a three-mile drive to Rushbrook Station, and then a ten-minutes train journey to Greystone, or, if one preferred it, a five-miles walk to Greystone, which boasted of being the county town of Southshire.

In winter, though the sandy roads never seemed muddy, the region could look very grand and desolate when storms swept over the great Beacon and rushed down to the valley, and when the roar of the voices of the winds among the huge firs added the charm of the awful and the terrible to this favoured spot.

Perhaps it is not enough realised how much the things we look at in our childhood help to mould our characters. Certainly something of the beauty and the honest waywardness of the nature around her had helped to form Elva Kestell's moods. She had come to Rushwood House when quite a child, and she could well remember how she had led her younger sister Amice many a journey of exploration, rejecting the escort of nurse or governess. Mrs. Kestell was an invalid and Mr. Kestell was but little at

home, and, moreover, a most indulgent father, so the two girls had, as it were, formed their own characters and strengthened their own inclinations, till now that they were grown into the come-out-young-lady age they were themselves, and not artificial girls; but so dissimilar were they that it would have been difficult to believe their close relationship. One, and one thing only, they equally possessed—a passionate love for their home, and for the beautiful nature that surrounded them. In Elva it came out in that passion of life—if one may use the expression—that determined associating of the mental with the physical existence, and that fitness of purpose which the winds of heaven apparently possess. But with Amice it was quite different. The still, deep, shrinking character seemed to understand the mysteries of the hidden world in a way in which very few have learnt to understand them, and which those few have seldom disclosed, preferring to carry their curious link with them to the grave than to expound it, perhaps being quite unable to tell us what hidden sympathy has connected them with the physical world.

This evening there were no wayward winds, however, and an exquisite moonlight haze seemed to envelope Rushbrook House with kindly softness; the trees were all painted in a dark-grey wash, and in the stillness of the early September evening not a leaf seemed to stir.

The shutters were not yet closed, and lights twinkled here and there in apparently magnified splendour. In one window, any person standing on the old, ivy-covered bridge would have noticed the outline of a girl crossing and recrossing the light within.

Elva Kestell was dressing for a dinner-party, but all at once she paused in this usually important occupation, and, sitting down by the side of her dressing-table, she thrust her well-shaped hands into a thick mass of wavy hair, and, with an impatient gesture, read for the third time a paragraph on one page of "*The Current Reader*."

Yet she knew the words almost by heart, and they seemed engraved on her brain with the exactness of an inscription on a piece of presentation plate:

"We have seldom read a book which so utterly failed in its purpose as does '*An Undine of To-day*,' by Isidore Kent. That the author had, when she wrote this novel, praiseworthy intentions, we can scarcely doubt, when we have waded

through her work; and we purposely say 'she,' for no masculine disguise could hide the sex of the writer whose purpose—always supposing she had one—has been to show that the apparently soulless being, whom we call a young lady in society, can be endowed with thought and feeling, if only some good man will take her in hand by the usual method of matrimony. But even this idea is undefined, and we are led to doubt not only whether the hero himself has a soul, but whether, if he has one, he would be capable of dividing it into two equal parts with his Undine. We shall not take away the little interest the book possesses by divulging the plot, but we must protest against Isidore Kent's false ideas of honour. She pours her vials of wrath upon her hero, who very naturally fights shy of a young lady whose relations were decidedly shady. We, on the other hand, would congratulate him on his narrow escape.

"It is a pity such novels as 'An Undine of To-day' find publishers, for they neither enrich literature nor the minds of those who read them.

HOEL FENNER."

Elva Kestell, having again reached the end of the notice, pushed back her chair, and said aloud :

"Hoel Fenner, I hate him! What a horrid, cruel review, and he has purposely misunderstood me."

Then she walked to her bookshelf and took down a volume bound in sky-blue cloth, and upon which one could read in gold letters, "An Undine of To-day, by Isidore Kent."

"One good thing is," she continued, mentally, "that no one but papa, mamma, and Amice know that I am Isidore Kent, and they will not tell, I made them promise. But I never thought a man could be so cruel as to publish such words. I will never, never write again—never; and yet I had something to say—all the same, I hate Hoel Fenner, and I wish I could tell him so."

A knock at the door made Elva put back her volume hastily, and remember that she was not ready, which fact the maid who entered saw to her dismay, and exclaimed :

"Oh, Miss Elva, the carriage will be round in five minutes, and Mr. Kestell is already downstairs."

"Well, make haste, Symee; this velvet dress is soon put on. It was too bad of Miss Amice to refuse to go; she was asked. Where's my fan?—quick, Symee, and the row of pearls."

"If you will sit down, Miss Elva, I will put this flower in your hair; it makes you look so nice," added Symee, in such a sweet, lady-like voice, that a stranger would at once have been struck by it. The truth was, Symee had been at Rushbrook House ever since her childhood, and many a game had she shared with her young mistresses.

Symee never forgot that Mr. Kestell had saved her and her brother from the workhouse, and she tried to repay her benefactor by an untiring devotion to his wife and daughters, which devotion they fully appreciated, and treated Symee more as a friend than a servant.

The five minutes were past before Elva managed to finish her toilet; and at this moment the door softly opened, and Amice Kestell stood on the threshold, looking more like some visitant from another world than the sister of such an altogether radiant person as Elva. Amice's face was perfectly colourless; so much so, that she appeared to be carved out of marble, except for the blue eyes that possessed a strange, far-off expression in them, whilst she had a curious habit of clasping her hands straight in front of her when she spoke. Even now, though Amice had come to say something, it was Elva who spoke first :

"Don't fuss, Amice dear; I shall be ready in two minutes."

Amice was dressed in plain white serge, high at the neck; and, thus attired, she contrasted curiously with her sister in her dark-blue velvet gown, cut square on her bosom, with the row of pearls round her slender throat, and the warm, rich colouring of her face. In a tableau the sisters would have made a good representation of Life and Death.

"Papa will be angry if you keep him waiting," said Amice, nervously. "I am glad I am not going."

"How ridiculous you are, Amice; papa angry, indeed! Why, he never is out of temper, is he, Symee? You are always saying things like that; it is not fair and just to papa."

Even in this speech the impulsive generosity of Elva was visible. She was devoted to her father, and was ready to stand up for him, even though she knew her tone would hurt the feelings of her sister.

"I never should say that to a stranger," said Amice, in a voice full of contrition; but certainly it was not Elva who frightened

her, for she stood gazing with undisguised admiration at her as she hurried hither and thither.

"There, I am ready; do I look nice, Amice?"

"Yes, you look beautiful," said Amice; "and oh, dear Elva, it was good of you to take my place."

"Good of me! You know I like society; only mamma is so upset by your hermit-like ideas. What shall I say to Mrs. Eagle Bennison to excuse your absence? Poor Symee, you will have something to do to clear my things away."

"Oh, come quickly, Elva; I hear papa calling you," said Amice, seizing her sister's hand.

The two went down the oak staircase together, hand in hand, and Mr. Kestell, who was standing below in the hall, saw them plainly as they approached, whilst the lamplight fell full on his white head; and Elva noted with a smile how handsome and how kind was the much-loved face of her father.

Mr. Kestell was of average height; but a slight stoop made him appear a little shorter than he was. His head was well-shaped, and of fine proportions; he wore his white hair just touching his coat-collar, and he had once been likened by an enthusiastic and musical lady to "that dear sweet old Liszt." And certainly there was a slight likeness between the well-known genius and Mr. Kestell, the much-respected solicitor of Greystone, whose benevolent look and clear blue eyes were known to inspire confidence in any one who had business dealings with him. At this moment the smile that lit up his face as he watched Elva coming down was quite reassuring. A man who smiles is not likely to be unduly severe, even if his horses have been kept waiting a few minutes.

"Eb, Miss Elva, five minutes late by the clock; and how often have I said the horses are not to be kept waiting by you girls? Come, make haste."

"Forgive me, father mine," said Elva, with a wonderfully bright look. "Now, don't forget your manners, but give me your arm properly, and hand a lady into her carriage in the most approved fashion. I should have been longer if Amice and Symee had not helped me."

Elva's words were full of affection, and the tone was that of a girl who knew she was loved and spoilt. As Mr. Kestell hurried across the hall, he involuntarily

glanced towards the white figure that stood so motionless at the foot of the stairs, and, slightly turning his head, he said:

"That was kind of you, Amice. Good night, my dear; you will be asleep when we come back. Take care of your mother."

Amice's white lips moved, but if she said anything it was inaudible to the two, who were quickly shut into the brougham by the help of the footman and butler. Amice waited till the sound of the wheels could no longer be heard, and then she walked to the morning-room, where Mrs. Kestell was sitting.

At a glance one could see that the wife of the rich solicitor was delicate, but it was the delicacy of a woman who has all her life been too much considered. No doctor could ever give a name to her illness, though one London physician, more truthful than wise, had said that there would be nothing the matter with Mrs. Kestell if she were a poor woman and had to earn her own living.

"So they are gone," she remarked to Amice, who sat down near her mother and shivered a little as if the room were cold, instead of being much too warm. "Why did not Elva come in?"

"She was late, and papa was—annoyed at being kept waiting."

"Was he? That is strange; he did not seem to mind when he was in here. Elva will coax him round. I wish, Amice, you were more like her, and that you would try to get over your eccentricities. You won't go into society, and even all the money that has been spent on your voice is thrown away, as you will sing so seldom."

Mrs. Kestell called Amice eccentric, and yet it was difficult to define in what way she was so, except in her shyness. Otherwise, if anything had to be done of a disagreeable nature, it was to Amice the household appealed.

There was but one very defined, strong feeling which Amice allowed others to see in her, and this was her love for her sister, and even this Mrs. Kestell did not altogether approve of.

"You know, mamma, that society does not appreciate the songs I care to sing."

"What nonsense! Elva's voice is not to be compared with yours, and yet she—I do believe you would be more like other girls if you did not continually shelter yourself behind her."

Amice did not answer this rebuke, but presently opened a book and read aloud till her mother dozed.

It might almost be said that Mrs. Kestell had dozed through life ever since her marriage with Josiah Kestell. He was a gentleman by birth, and had succeeded to a good solicitor's business at Greystone, and this business he had trebled by luck and hard work. Now, however, he took life more easily, leaving the hard work to his partner, Edward Hope, a cousin of his wife. Mr. Kestell was known to be very rich, having a property on which, some twenty-three years before, valuable mines had been discovered and worked with extraordinary success. The two Miss Kestells were therefore known to be endowed with much of this world's goods, and now that they were come out there was some speculation as to their future husbands, and, though it is unpoetical to mention the fact, several elderly men who looked upon Mr. Kestell as their most trusted friend, had deeply considered whether they could not improve their fortunes by offering themselves as his sons-in-law.

Mrs. Kestell was of a very good family. She was the third daughter of Sir Arthur Ovenden, whose acres were few, whose pedigree was long, whose debts were many, and whose pride was unlimited. But man must live, and so must his daughters, and when Celia Ovenden was wooed by Josiah Kestell, gentleman, and solicitor of Greystone, Sir Arthur, knowing that if he died suddenly his girls' portions would be extremely small, accepted Mr. Kestell's offer with as good a grace as the owner of so many noble ancestors could muster, though at the same time telling Josiah Kestell that he formerly had views of his daughter Celia marrying a rich man.

"I shall be rich," was Josiah's answer. "I have an excellent business at Greystone, and I will double it. I promise you that your daughter shall live as she has been accustomed to live."

Sir Arthur gave in with a great show of reluctance, though the truth was, that Celia became at once better off than she had been in the parental household. Since then, her husband had so well kept his promise that the after-dinner theme of poor men was Kestell of Greystone's fortune. There had not only been hard work to account for it—though that had not been wanting—but there had also been luck in

his mining operations, and, as money has a curious affinity with its own kind, money had made money, had doubled money, had coined money, so that Mrs. Kestell could now patronise the elder sisters who had said slighting things about Celia's marrying only a solicitor.

Besides money, Mrs. Kestell had a devoted husband. For her sake he had bought Rushbrook House; for her sake he cultivated society, and entertained as much as was possible; and he seemed well rewarded for his trouble if she sometimes expressed a sleepy pleasure at her possessions, or made the rare exertion to go to a dinner-party. But now the girls were grown up, and it seemed very unlikely that Mrs. Kestell would ever again exert herself to go about with her husband.

When Amice and her mother had dined, the former again read aloud, for Mrs. Kestell liked to listen to the musical murmur of her daughter's voice; but the "Life of Sister Dora" was far beyond the comprehension of Celia Kestell, and before ten o'clock she said she would go to bed.

"And pray, dear Amice, don't sit up reading; it makes you more eccentric. Go to bed, and try and get a little colour in your cheeks. Undressing at night is a great trouble; but I must say that Symee is very quick and handy. What a blessing your father's kindness has turned out for us! I'm sure one would often do kind things if one could look forward and see how it answers in the end."

The bell was rung. A footman lit the candle and opened the doors; the house-keeper came to suggest some new dainty to put by the invalid's bedside; Symee met her mistress on the stairs. Thus, with the help of three persons, Mrs. Kestell retired to bed.

Left alone in the sitting-room, with its shaded lamps and its luxurious chairs, Amice Kestell breathed a little sigh of relief. She went to the window, and, drawing back the curtain, she gazed out at the beautiful moonlit bridge, the pool, and the great Beacon in the distance. She could catch the light in the Observatory and in some few smaller houses, as if the stars had fallen upon earth; but the beauty of the scene did not seem to impress any look of joy on the marble-like face. On the contrary, it seemed a little to irritate her, and, dropping the heavy folds, Amice began slowly pacing the sitting-room with clasped hands and her head a little

thrown back, apparently quite lost to the riches and comforts which surrounded her.

"Sister Dora was a grand woman," she said, talking to herself; "but I prefer Catherine of Sienna. If only one could be like her! Oh, why is it impossible? Why do things about one seem to tie one down with unbreakable chains? It is so difficult, so difficult; and what is right? How much of the world can one renounce? Here they are angry with me. Mamma wants me to love society, and papa—only Elva has pity on me. My dear, dear sister—but she cannot understand—she is better than I am, and all this gold does not hurt her. It is gold, gold that is eating away one's life. How can I get rid of it? But they say I am wrong, that this feeling is merely self-will and pride. Is it true, O Heaven? Tell me, and let me know the truth."

So strong was the girl's distress that she paused suddenly, and kneeling down on the floor, hid her face in her hands in mute and tearless agony.

That undefinable mystery, a young wrestling soul full of the realisation of its own life and its own hopes and fears, its own struggles and attempts at soaring above its surroundings, has been over and over again presented to the world; and the world, not being able to understand the phenomenon, gives to it various gently sarcastic names, such as self-deception, spiritual pride, and wilful ignorance, or, if driven to stronger language, sums it all up in the term "superstitious folly." No wonder that many—and Amice was one of these—shrink with overpowering fear from asking for help from those who pretend to answer all riddles; and, instead of begging for sympathy, suffer agonies of mental tortures in trying to make the spiritual and the physical life join hands.

Amice took no account of time as she knelt on, till suddenly a slight shiver passed through her, and, rising hastily, she walked upstairs.

As she ascended the low, broad steps, lighted by a large window, the branches of an old yew-tree were shaken by the night wind; and it seemed as if some bony fingers had knocked at the window and signalled to Amice to come out; but she heeded nothing, only walked on till she reached a small door at the end of a long, uncarpeted passage at the top of the house. Here she paused, and knocked softly. A faint voice said, "Come in;" and Amice

entered, to find her maid Symee lying down on her bed in a bare little room, where only the moon gave a fitful light.

Symee was fully dressed, and only covered up with a shawl; but surprise caused her to sit up for a moment as her young mistress said:

"Symee, your head is bad; undress and go to bed. Don't sit up for Miss Elva; I will help her when she comes in."

At the same time Amice put a cool, soft hand on the maid's forehead, which sent a momentary delicious relief from pain to the aching brow.

"Miss Amice, how kind you are! How did you know I had a headache? But I must sit up."

"No, you must go to bed. Make haste; I will come back when you are undressed."

Amice walked softly out of the room, and went to the end of the passage, where a window looked out on to the sloping lawns and hanging woods of Rushbrook House.

"I must hide it," she thought. "I dare not tell any one. Is it a gift, or—" She shivered a little. "What am I saying? That I will not have what God gives me. How can I be so wicked? Surely we are children in God's hands, and yet have we free will. How can both things be possible? How are we to guide ourselves, and yet be guided by God?"

This puzzling thought filled the girl's mind till she returned to her maid, whom she found in bed, but hardly able to bear the terrible pain in her head.

"Miss Amice, please put your hand on my head again," she moaned, "it is so cool."

"I will," said Amice; and kneeling down on the bare boards, she once more placed her soft, cool hand on Symee's head. And had any one been present they would have seen her white figure lit up with dancing moonbeams, which, as they now and then touched her pale face, showed that her lips were moving.

After a short silence Symee spoke.

"Oh, Miss Amice, it seems like a miracle. The pain is going; thank you so very much. I feel sleepy; and yet I thought just now I should be awake all night."

"Hush!" said Amice; and when, after a little while, she rose from her knees, Symee was sleeping as quietly as a tired child after a day's pleasure.

## THE LIFE MONASTIC.

LIKE all sober, honest persons who have a strong, wholesome horror of romance, Herr Bædeker, the author—it does not matter if he is the proprietor, instead of wholly the author—of a number of remarkable books, is now and then as amusing as the man who arranges his life for the entertainment exclusively of his fellow beings. I believe it is possible to laugh over the publications of the Statistical Society. Bædeker is nearly as matter-of-fact as this honourable society; and, therefore, nearly as grave. But when I chance, in one or other of the clever Teuton's handbooks, to come upon an exact and methodical description of the route to the summit of a mountain with such a cheering appendix as "a hermit at the top," for the enlivenment of the spirits of the weary tourist, I feel disposed to clap Herr Bædeker on his broad back, and to counsel him straightway to change his vocation, and become a contributor to "Punch."

No doubt, however, this sort of humour is thoroughly unconscious. It would be very tame if it were not. To Herr Bædeker, the spectacle of a man, with faculties and aspirations more or less like his own, residing all the year round on a mountain-top for a reason, or for reasons that do not commend themselves to the intelligence, is less humorous than noteworthy. And it is noteworthy only because the ladies and gentlemen who never leave their hearths unaccompanied by Bædekers and opera-glasses, will, for gross reasons of the flesh, be glad to know that when their toil of a day is at an end, they will be greeted among the clouds by a human being of like passions with themselves, who will, perhaps, have some nice, cool wine in his cellar hewn in the rocks. To Herr Bædeker, and to the average tourist, there is nothing extremely odd in the fact that in the nineteenth century there should be found men willing to live a life of seclusion and, let us hope, asceticism, upon sites so elevated that the idea of them alone would perchance have frozen the blood of Saint Simeon Stylites, whose column was but a few dozen feet above the soil in which it was fixed.

A hermit of this kind cannot really be termed a legitimate hermit. His life is not by any means wholly consecrated to reflection upon his innate depravity. In the season, if not all through the year, he

has much diversion in the visitors who ascend to see him, and the sunrise or the sunset. These visitors at first look at him as if he were a native of the moon. But when they find that he is human, in spite of his preposterously long beard and nebulous dwelling-place, they thaw towards him, and, for an hour or two, treat him with cordiality, and even distinction. The odds are, that a luncheon-basket has climbed to the hermitage with the travellers. In this case, of course, the hermit relaxes his self-imposed discipline. He puts the wine in his own icy well until it is wanted. Plates, tumblers, and so forth, he provides from his chambers in the rock. And, at length, when appetite is ripe, he sits with his visitors, and eats a hearty and luxurious meal. Perhaps, no sooner is one party done with, and one luncheon-basket emptied, than a second party and a second basket appear on his horizon.

What—to a man with digestive organs beyond suspicion, as the hermit's are sure to be—could be more pleasurable than this? And so, at close of day, when the sun has set for a naughty world, and only the mountain-top and the hermit are illumined by its rosy beams, the hermit may be supposed to sing his vesper hymn with true convictions of contentment, and duly retire to his frigid but healthful couch to sleep calmly through the hours of the night. He knows no care; and the morrow will but repeat the joys of to-day.

I have talked with such a solitary, while the mountain mist eddied about us, and the wind whistled against his rocks. This hermit was of no order of Churchmen. He was not even under vows to say so many "Ave Marias" an hour or daily during his career as hermit. But he was a strong, hearty, bronzed man who declared that he found much satisfaction in sounding the bell of the little church which adjoined his dwelling. This he did twice or thrice a day—at noon, and I believe also at sunrise and sunset. The villagers a mile or two below him hear his bell, and heart goes forth to meet heart, though hands are not long enough to reach his hand as he tolls forth the hour.

To me the man's life seemed the perfection of idleness. He was illiterate. I asked if he read books, but the only book he could show was a tattered volume in which jocose visitors inscribed jocose verses about their host. To be sure he

was something of an agriculturist. But his little garden patch was not at all times available for spade and shovel, and it was too small to occupy a tithe of his natural energies. It remained for me to suppose that he sat through most of the minutes of his dull life, conjecturing when the sun shall arise, when it shall set, and when it is time to ring the midday bell. In the little church dedicated to Saint Nicolas which, like his dwelling, was hewn from the mountain-top, was a square vault-stone. Beneath this stone lay, in a neatly chiselled hole, the bones and dust of divers generations of hermits, my friend's predecessors. These relics were his constant companions, and the only companions who were constantly with him. But their mouldering bodies were nothing to our hermit. He did not even regard them with conventional reverence. And he was openly gleeful because, by a modern law of the land, which forbade burial within the walls of a church except in very special cases, he himself had not to anticipate a final home on the top of the débris of his lonely predecessors.

This reminds me of another spectacle, edifying or not according to your humour, which may be seen in Rome any day upon payment of a few coppers. Here also we have a fine commentary upon the life monastic. It is in the vaults underneath the Capuchin Monastery by the palace of the Barberini family. A gaunt old Capuchin, with a merry eye, and a well-disciplined mind, acts as cicerone to the visitors. If you ask him whether the sight you are going to see is so very appalling, he will smile upon you with much benevolence and some pity, and perhaps reply: "Why should it frighten any one? We are but dust and ashes from the beginning. It is well to know it." But this excellent counsel, an unconscious larceny from the philosophy of the Grecian sage, is not so acceptable to all his visitors as time and the vacuity of his own life have made it for himself.

You descend a few steps, a door is opened, and before you is a suite of five rooms, admirably decorated in arabesque. But the decorations are not the work of an upholsterer or a long-dead artist to whom, with the flight of centuries, a phantom of fame has come. They are the laboured work of the Capuchins themselves. And the material they have used is nothing in the world else but the bones of their departed comrades.

It is as grim a show as the world holds. Each of the five chambers is carpeted to the depth of a few feet, with brown, dry soil, brought in ships from the Holy Land. Herein, almost in view from above, lay for a time each monk after his death. Then he was exhumed, and his skeleton carefully broken up into serviceable portions. Even so, when a palace has outlived its occupants, the buyer of old bricks and beams secures it at auction, and, with pick and chisel, takes it to pieces, and makes other use of the fragments.

But not all the dead monks were privileged to be resolved into parts that may be said to be without individuality. Some of them had defied the grave and the soil of Palestine so amazingly, that the idea struck upon the superiors of the Monastery to set up these admirable mummies of Christianity, clad in their grave-clothes, to serve as a lesson to their living brethren. And so thus they stand, grinning at the stranger from under their brown woollen cowls, and ticketed with the date of their demise.

My guide through this dolorous entertainment had been on intimate terms with Brother A——, who had died in 1861, and who now stood, stiff, ugly, and still, gazing at us with sightless eyes. "Yes, he is as natural as the rest," he remarks with his unvarying smile, when I comment upon the condition of his friend.

One would like to fancy that he has sorrowed by the side of his dead comrade upon more suitable occasions. But, to tell the truth, it is probable he has never shed a tear in his life. It is in the nature of the life monastic. Sympathy, in its common human form, does not exist within convent walls. Such sympathy as a monk may cherish in his heart is an exotic sympathy, out of touch with the hearts of those who live in the world of which they are an active and actual part. The monk has done with the world.

For my part, I would as soon confide the woes and griefs of my soul to a stone image as to a monk. His condolences are of too stereotyped an order to suit those who require genuine and discriminating solace. One feels that he will carry the same face, the same sympathy, and the same methodical benediction to his next patient. There is too much of the immutability of the sphinx about him, too little of the man.

Reflection shows us that it must be so. A man is not made more of a man by

the curtailment of the sum of interests which touch his mind. On the contrary : it is with human beings as with those fallen members of the vegetable and animal world who have allowed certain of their natural faculties to glide into disuse. This neglect does not kill them, any more than his abstention from most of the pleasures and responsibilities of existence puts an end to the monk. But, as surely as the progress of time, it degrades them.

The vegetable which has shirked this or that function of life, because it was a little irksome, pays the penalty. Its fellow vegetables, who have honestly responded to all the calls which Nature has made upon them, look down upon it as a debased vegetable. And similarly with the monk. He, no less than the vegetable, pays the penalty for his evasion of those bracing cares and anxieties of life which are to our faculties like oil to machinery. He may state the case how he pleases towards his own intelligence. No doubt he will readily be able to convince himself that he is doing his duty by himself.

But the monk now and then realises, with sharp sorrow of soul, that his gain is hardly commensurate with his loss. The men of the world whom he presumes to tax with iniquity, because they are more active than himself, are, as a rule, indulgent enough towards him. It does not matter whether their indulgence is the outcome of contempt or a sincere spirit of universal tolerance. But it is not always so. And when it does happen that a pitched battle between the two classes takes place, then the monk learns how he has erred, and how seriously his eyesight is affected by his habit of going blindfold through the highways of life.

That is a solid saying which the Duke of Wellington is reported to have uttered about the worth of public opinion as an educative agent : " You will never have confidence in yourself until you see others have confidence in you." There is much in it. Indeed, it would little profit a man to have the utmost confidence in himself if other men put no confidence in him. It takes two to make a confidence ; and only the best controlled of philosophers may find pleasure in the self-assurance that everything he does is well done, if at the same time the rest of the world looks askance at him, as at a person little to be trusted.

Now the monk is in a position that makes this discipline of confidence impos-

sible. He may have the most admirable abilities, abilities which burn for recognition ; but they must remain latent. And though originally adapted to excite the largest amount of the world's confidence, he is to his death-day an unknown quantity. The best he can do for himself is to stifle his genius. He takes a soporific, and exclaims : " Behold, how well I sleep ! "

But I fancy the life monastic stands most strongly condemned in its effect upon the minds of those who devote themselves to it. They make a solitude around themselves and call that solitude peace. How incredibly false is this nomenclature none but monks themselves may tell. But the writings of a hundred cloistered solitaries, who were supposed to have coerced themselves into a state of tranquil beatitude, sufficiently tell the story, without direct confession of mouths. What passion and yearning one finds in these books ! What extravagance, what rant ! As a rule, there is little indeed of the calm of the Quietists in the minds of those in cloistered cell.

And yet the wonder is that this obvious effect of monastic life was never foreseen at the outset of monastic foundations ; or, if seen, that the deduction was not esteemed strong enough to stifle in their birth all such establishments. It is surely more true that " *laborare est orare*," than that " *orare est laborare*." Honest employment, inasmuch as it is the best occupation for mind and body, is, methinks, the most acceptable of oraisons. The man who spends five hundred hours in building a house for others, is really more respectable than the man who passes five hundred hours upon his knees in prayer for his own amelioration. Work itself is an ameliorative agent, the value of which can hardly be over-estimated. On the other hand, excessive prayer may, without irreverence, be termed a spiritual debauch, which enfeebles, instead of invigorating the mind. Fanaticism may readily be, as it has often been, the outcome of this loss of mental balance. And thus the worst of crimes are wrought as the direct offspring of the defects of the monastic life unalloyed.

Even at the best the monastic life is a life of stagnation. Even when there is judicious discipline, and no lack of employment in making liqueurs, like the Chartreuse and the Benedictine, in making boots and shoes, spudding vines, or crushing grapes, the monk is not more than half a man. He is, to the rest of us,

mainly but a child—a creature with the body of an adult, and the mind of a boy. The monks of Greece, including the residents on Mount Athos, are so ignorant of the most ordinary facts that they would not be in the least surprised to be told that another continent had been discovered. I will go farther, and say that Brother Chrysostom or Elias of Athos would hesitate ere attempting to confute you if you ventured to assert that they had come motherless into the world. Of womankind, indeed, they know nothing. Their gorgeous pictures and mosaics of the Virgin in blue and gold are their only public recognition of the existence of a sex which their rules compel them to treat with the most contemptuous and chilling neglect.

It is odd to consider how, in our own day, there is a revival of the monkish spirit—in Protestant England, too, which so long ago levelled her monasteries as intolerable things. A monk in England, moreover, is happier far than a monk in Catholic Italy. We do not revile him. We do not threaten him with spoliation of what trivial personal effects he has, or issue decrees annexing the estate of his establishment. He swings his skirts and his rosary in our lanes with a solid tread of ease, and excites such awe and reverence in our cherry-cheeked country damsels, as an angel from Heaven might evoke from them. Our artists from town hasten to sketch him. Ploughboys call him "your reverence," or by the dulcet and venerable title of "Father." And even those wasps of the age, the journalists, since they are not personally aggrieved by his existence, are prone to say good things about him as the provider in one way or another of items of copy which are susceptible of picturesque elaboration, and which call forth into light untried powers of argument and new-born allusions. And so Brother Clement is content. His establishment is wealthy. The most famous of modern British architects has designed the building, which bristles with gargoyles grim and long. In its list of patrons are the names of exalted persons, and of sympathetic ladies of rank. The latter confess to Brother Clement, and humbly kiss his hand in token of their submission to him as their spiritual father. He lives in the midst of delightful natural scenery, and breathes the purest air. The rules of the monastery allow a certain amount of society. This, at his

pleasure, he can alternate with studious solitude, books of a tranquillising kind, and devotional exercises in a church that, for its aesthetic beauty and choice materials, is the wonder of three counties. He lives apart from the sin of cities. Perhaps, once a year, he is summoned to preach a course of stirring sermons in the metropolis. The task is not unpleasing. Though he has forsaken fame as one of the vanities of life, his sermons make him famous. And long ere the work becomes tedious to him, it is ended, and he has returned to the monastic nest to receive the commendations of his superiors, and the congratulations of those of his brethren who do not envy him.

"All we ask is to be left in peace—with our properties." Such was the plaintive wail to me, the other day, of a monk in Italy. He was a forlorn remnant of a rich establishment, situated on a romantic mountain-top. The monastery had been rich; but the Government had despoiled it. Of old, there were forty monks in it. Its lands stretched for miles in two directions from the hill. The bell of its chapel sounded daily over the plain. Daily, also, pilgrims, who revered the bald-headed fathers, climbed the tiresome cliff, and put money in the alms-boxes. "We were rich," said the monk; "and our wine was bought in Rome at a high price."

But these happy days are at an end. The conventional estates have been sold by the Government to a speculator, who has raised walls against the monastery, and makes its inmates pay for the water they draw from the very well their predecessors had sunk.

It is curious, as I have said, that the state of affairs in a Protestant and a Catholic country should be, respectively, what it is. But, in effect, there is not much difference between the life monastic in England and Italy. If the one may sufficiently be justified, so also may the other.

#### PROVERB.

"A WATCHED pot never boils," the old wives say;  
Though Love himself to stir the embers strive,  
Though Hope with laughing lips does all she may  
To keep the fitful flickering flame alive.

Though Passion rouses with his fervid breath  
A little glow, he wearis, and it dies,  
And the heaped coal grow grey and chill beneath  
The piteous pleading of Faith's wistful eyes.

Nay, Wisdom whispers, seek for other fare,  
Nor waste life's summer in such useless toils;  
In vain, the fond Trust, wrapped in love and prayer,  
Sits by the hearth—"the watched pot never boils."

## THE END OF THE STORY.

## A COMPLETE STORY.

IT was a little white cottage with a green door and a garden in front full of holly-hocks, wall-flowers, Canterbury bells, and all sorts of old-fashioned flowers; screened from the public gaze by a thick privet hedge, but over the top of which the inquisitive passer-by might still, at times, catch a glimpse of Miss Priscilla Pritchett, in an appalling sun-bonnet and prodigious wash-leather gloves, engaged in gardening operations and waging war against all caterpillars and other horticultural depredators.

The crossest old maid in the village—or out of it—so people said, and the ugliest too, said the boys who made raids upon her apple-trees, purloined her cherries, and chivied her poultry. And yet there were one or two sober-minded, middle-aged folk who declared that they remembered a time when Miss Priscilla was a young and pretty girl, who wouldn't have said “boh!” to a goose, much less have threatened to take the law of Jim Andrews for throwing stones at her cat—and he the only son of Widow Andrews, who every one knew was as decent and hard-working a woman as ever kept body and soul together by going out washing and keeping a little shop. But these same worthy people were wont to add, with a shake of the head, for the benefit of those unbelievers to whom the idea of Miss Pritchett ever having been otherwise than the grim, gaunt, and aggressive female they now knew, seemed fabulous and incredible: “Ah, that was before Dick Merton went wrong and jilted her, with the wedding-day fixed and all!”

Young and pretty! Ah, well, she was old and ugly enough now, and that was all that the rising generation cared. They saw no pathos in the sharp, bony features; nor the light of a long-gone-by love story in those keen, remorseless eyes, always on the alert, and keeping a sharp look-out for opportunities to pounce upon, and salute with a cuff or a shake, those youthful predators and juvenile offenders by whom she was held in such peculiar abhorrence. And to imagine for an instant that those shrill, rasping tones had ever fallen in sweet and dulcet melody upon the ear of, at least, one individual, was a thing, the mere supposition of which involuntarily caused the nose of the sce-

tical to elevate itself in scorn. Miss Priscilla Pritchett was an old maid—must have been born in that capacity, and would infallibly continue in the same to the end of the chapter.

And, truth to tell, she was not a pre-possessing object as she stood, a grim, motionless figure, between the rows of tall hollyhocks and trim lavender bushes which lined the path leading to her tiny cottage. Tall and gaunt, with scant wiry hair dragged away from her seamed and weather-beaten features, and screwed up behind into what resembled a ball of grey worsted—there, with everything round her as fresh and green as she was worn and grizzled, as she stood, brandishing in one hand a pair of large gardening scissors, with defiance and contempt towards mankind generally expressive in her very attitude, she presented an unclassical, but not unfaithful, representation of that eldest of the three fates, Atropos by name, who is represented as holding the fatal shears with which to cut the thread of human life. For on that day of all days did Miss Priscilla hold herself aggrieved and indignant, and was consequently in a frame of mind which might well have made the boldest boy who ever coveted his neighbour's apple tree, shudder.

For had not she that very morning, while arrayed in her full panoply of sunbonnet, leather gloves, and coarse working apron, been stared at over her own hedge by a man—a member of that vile and abominable sex, whose ways were the ways of deceitfulness, and whose ultimate end was perdition! A man—and what was more, a disreputable man—though in Miss Pritchett's eyes they were all more or less disreputable (generally more). But this was the out-at-elbows, ragged, and foot-sore disreputableness; in fact, it was a tramp, and one whose fortunes were—to judge by his outer man—at their lowest and most poverty-stricken ebb, who had thus dared to desecrate by his impudent gaze the sanctity of those precincts, within whose boundaries no masculine and contaminating foot was allowed to tread. That little white gate was kept latched alike in the face of parson, provision merchant, or tax collector. The butcher or baker might hand their wares over the uncompromising portal, but woe betide them, or any one who, on his own responsibility, dared to cross that virgin threshold. The postman, when he came at all—which was not more frequently than twice or thrice in the year

—stuck his missive in the hedge and decamped, after ringing the bell.

In fact, only those ribald boys before mentioned, to whom that gate was as the gate of Paradise, by reason of the rosy-cheeked apples and juicy cherries which hung ripening within, out of their reach, had dared to invade that chaste and solitary domain. And even they—after the terrible fate of that youthful malefactor, Tim Rawlings, who, scared at the sudden and awful apparition of Miss Priscilla in a nightcap, had fallen out of the tree and broken his leg—had fought shy of that jealous enclosure, and shunned all possible contact with its lonely tenant, as they would have avoided the plague.

But to return to the tramp, whose reprehensible conduct had awakened such wrath and—though she would have contradicted it flily with her last breath—such uneasiness in Miss Priscilla's breast. A ragged, dusty, grey, disreputable, and worn-out old tramp! A man who might have been fifty or so, but whose feeble frame might also have been bent by the weight of an additional score of years! And there he stood, as Miss Priscilla observed on raising herself from her occupation of weeding her narrow gravel path, and making it in all respects what a gravel path should be—for every one knows that this is an employment which requires a considerable amount of back-straightening from time to time, especially when there is a tendency to rheumatism, and we are not so young as we have been. Judge, then, her righteous indignation, when, on pausing from her toil, she beheld the head and shoulders of a man over her high privet hedge—the head having, by way of covering, the battered remnant of a wideawake, and the shoulders being clad in a coat, which was so old and ragged as to be of a particularly light and airy description, suitable to the time of the year, and proving to consist, on closer acquaintance, of a sleeve and a half, and miscellaneous assortment of patches.

Miss Pritchett was so amazed and disgusted at the indecency of his conduct, that at first she could do nothing but stare back at him, until finding her tongue—which was never mislaid for any length of time—she addressed him as a good-for-nothing vagabond, and bade him begone!

The man thus attacked—"As ill-looking a wretch as ever I saw!" soliloquised Miss Priscilla (and in one sense he certainly was)—touched his battered old hat

with his forefinger, and made as though he would have spoken; but before he could open his lips, she let loose upon him such a flood of vituperation, and threatened him with such dire and dreadful penalties, if he dared to lay a finger on the tiniest twig, or asked for so much as a crust, that the wretched wayfarer drooped his weary old head, and, with a dreary shake of the bent shoulders, shambed off.

Miss Priscilla took the precaution, after thus effectually warning him off the premises, to see that he was not loitering anywhere in the neighbourhood, or lurking round a corner, with the foul intent of returning after dark and making a felonious entry. Then she saw, as he limped slowly along the white, dusty road, that he was followed at a little distance by a boy, a little, bare-footed lad, who wore the same weary, desolate look, and whose head drooped upon his shoulders in the same hopeless way as that of the man in whose footsteps he was treading.

Miss Priscilla looked after them both until they turned a corner of the road and disappeared from her sight. Then she snorted so portentously that her sunbonnet fell off, and muttered to herself:

"A pretty pair, no doubt! I don't have no tramps hanging about my place, a-telling me they're starving, and not a bit of shoe-leather to their foot! Serve 'em right!"

And, so saying, she picked up her gardening implements, and stalking up the gravel path she had been so carefully weeding before the interruption came, entered the house and banged the door behind her, as though by so doing she would cut off all unpleasant thoughts, as well as communication with the outside world.

But it was quite in vain. There had been something in the abject misery and want, so plainly depicted in the man's face, which haunted her, something which came back again and again, as she tried to thrust it aside; and as she went about her small household duties there rose up continually before her the picture of those two, the man and the boy, as they took their weary way along the dusty road in the heat of the day. And he, the elder of the two, was an oldish man, she thought to herself indignantly. What did he mean by it, tramping about the country and worrying respectable folks who kept themselves to themselves and couldn't abide tramps?

And so the hours went by, until it was

evening, and once more she was at work among her flowers, watering, and cutting away the dead leaves, and tending them carefully. More than once during this, her favourite employment, she found her thoughts wandering back resentfully to that good-for-nothing old tramp ; and once she felt herself constrained to go to the gate, and standing there, gaze along the road round the corner of which those two unwelcome visitants had disappeared. Though why she did it, or what she expected to see there, she refused to acknowledge, even to herself.

"I'm an old fool ;" she said at last, when it was getting so dusk that she could no longer distinguish leaf from bloom, and the water-can had been filled and emptied an indefinite number of times. "An old fool !" she repeated emphatically, as she pulled off her thick gardening-gloves and deposited the rake in its own particular corner. "And I don't care who says I ain't. Why, bless and save us, what's that ?" Surely somebody was trying to open the gate ! Somebody who was very small, and who rattled the latch ineffectually in his efforts to force an entrance. Seizing the rake again in one hand, as a protection against the bold marauder, whoever he might be, Miss Pritchett advanced with hasty steps and with a strange, unaccustomed feeling of what was almost like dread in her heart. Who could he be who dared — ?

With fingers trembling with what might have been wrath, but what was curiously like agitation, she raised the latch, at the same time exclaiming in her gruffest and most uncompromising tones : "Who's that ?"

Whoever it was had evidently found his courage fail him at the last moment, and was fleeing, as for his life, through the gathering gloom, and Miss Pritchett could tell by the soft thud of his feet on the dusty road, that he was bare-footed. Poor half-starved little wretch, faint and footsore as he was, a few score strides brought him within reach, and, being grasped by what might have been his collar—had he possessed such an appendage—he was hauled up sharp and dragged back again.

"Now then !" as soon as she had got her breath, "what do you mean by it, eh ?" with a feint at knocking his head against the gate-post. "After my cherries, were you ? Just let me catch you at it, will you !" with a shake that made his teeth rattle.

The miserable, scared little mortal tried to wriggle out of her hands ; but she held him like a vice, though, at the same time, she was conscious of a tightening at her heart and a dread of something that was coming. Then, gathering up the remnants of his courage, the lad spoke in a quavering voice :

"Please, it was father——"

"What's that got to do with it ?" exclaimed the outraged spinster. "Drat your father—and you too !"

The last as an after-thought ; and then she shook him again, until he staggered, and would have fallen, but for the grip she had on him.

"Father's dying," he murmured brokenly, "and he sent me to give you this."

And, opening his ragged jacket, he pointed to a fragment of paper pinned inside for safety.

"A begging letter, I dare say. Take it away. I won't look at it. You ought to be in jail, you and your father too—a regular bad lot ! Dying, indeed ! What's that to me, I should like to know ?"

But the boy, whose small, white face and famine-sharpened features filled her with a sense of vague discomfort, and seemed somehow like a little reproachful ghost conjured up from the past, repeated again, in dazed, weak tones :

"Father's dying. He says he can't go on no longer—he's dead beat, he is, and must give up—and I was to give you this."

The sense of tightness at her heart increased, and became as though a hand had been laid upon it and was clutching it in an iron grasp, as she read, by the light of the moon, the straggling, half-illegible words scrawled in pencil by a trembling hand, on the torn, crumpled paper :

"Pray come to me at Sharker's Rents and see me before I die.

"DICK MERTON."

There was a feeling as though everything was whirling round her, followed by another which seemed to tell her that she had known it all from the very first moment she had caught sight of those pinched and haggard features across the hedge, and watched the two figures plodding along the hard, dusty road, in the morning sunshine. Releasing, for the first time, her clutch of the boy's jacket, she put out her hand to support herself by the gate-post ; and as she did so the captive fled for the second time, and urged on by panic and fear of falling again into those

bony and remorseless hands, was almost instantly swallowed up in the dusk.

Miss Priscilla still stood there with one hand on the gate-post, and the other grasping the scrap of paper, motionless and oblivious, until at last, with a nervous shudder, and a sudden coming to herself, she turned and tottered slowly up the path, and re-entering the house, shut herself in with her memories of the past.

He was dying, and begged her to come to him before he died! She, the woman whom he had jilted and deceived, and made a byword and a laughing stock! He, the man who had crush'd her heart, and abandoned her for another within a week of the wedding-day, until she had turned against all mankind for his false sake! Was she to meekly and promptly obey the summons which this man had sent—who said he was dying, but who might only scoff at her, and hold her up to ridicule? Dying, was he? Let him die, and cumber the ground no longer! Then, in a tumult of rage and furious indignation as she thought of the traitor who had wrecked her life and left her, she seized a candle, and with hasty steps trod the steep staircase leading to the upper storey of her four-roomed cottage, where was the thing she sought. An ancient and ponderous oak chest, in a dark corner of an empty, unoccupied room, with a rusty key which turned so stiffly in the lock that she was obliged to set her candle beside her on the floor, and strive with both hands before she could unlock it. At last, with a creak and a harsh, grating sound, it gave way. A mouldy smell, as though years had passed since the lid had last been raised, and after that a fainter odour of dried lavender, or of some dead, fragrant herb, long gone to dust; then a white cloth, or what had once been white, but was now yellow and discoloured by the progress of time, and under that—an old-fashioned gown, short-waisted, and sprigged with rosebuds; and beside it a large and equally old-fashioned straw bonnet, trimmed with white ribbons, and with roses under the wide brim.

"My wedding-dress!" she muttered, with what was almost a sob, though strangled in its birth by fierce pride and scorn of her own weakness. She took them out and held them up to the light—that now strange-looking, scanty, befrilled garment, in whose folds the moths had held possession so long and undisturbed that the delicate fabric was eaten through and

through in a hundred different places, while the bonnet-ribbons, on investigation, proved to be mottled with small round spots and splashes, as though tears had once been rained upon them before bonnet and gown had been hidden away those twenty years and more. "My wedding-gown!" she muttered; this time with an angry light in her eye, and a dull red flush on the sharp cheek-bones of that gaunt, grim face. "My wedding-gown! and he let me for the barmaid at the 'George and Dragon,' and ran away with her and his master's money! Let him die! I wouldn't raise my little finger to save him!"

Then, as she sat beside the open chest, she fell into a waking dream, in which she saw two figures—a young man and a girl—a rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, happy-looking girl, walking together through the fields by the river-side at the close of a summer day, and one of them said: "Only a month to-morrow to the wedding-day." And there was no reply; but a bird overhead broke out into song, and the soft wind rustled the long grass by the brink of the river; and the two figures passing on side by side, melted into the golden haze of the setting sun; while another scene took the place of the first.

A cluster of deserted, ruinous hovels in a marshy, low-lying district, near to a stagnant pool, in one of which a worn-out tramp lay dying in the darkness, with no one near him but a little, half-starved lad, with perhaps one hard crust to be shared between the two; while the damp, unwholesome mist from without, creeping in through the gaping crevices in wall and roof, enveloped the chilly form lying on a heap of mouldy straw and refuse, like a pall.

"Will she never come?" he murmured, feebly, as he tossed restlessly on his wretched death-bed. "Not even when she knows I'm dying? Oh, she's hard, hard, cruel hard!"

The faint voice died away in long-drawn moans; the grey head fell back, and lay with wide-open, sightless eyes, staring upwards to where the stars twinkled down through the holes in the roof, and there was nothing heard but the stifled sobs of the little lad, as, with a cry of "Father! father! speak to me, father!" he flung himself upon the lifeless body.

"The Lord forgive me!" cried Miss Priscilla, five minutes later, as, with her bonnet pitched on anyhow, and her shawl awry, she took her way at a breath-

less pace along the dark, lonely, country road, and across the fields which intervened between her own tidy cottage and those desolate and deserted habitations known as "Sharker's Rents." Hastening along in a tumult of conflicting feeling, dreading lest she might be too late, hoping that her fears were vain, tumbling over the stones, and wiping her eyes on her bonnet-strings, she hurried on faster and faster, though never had her progress appeared so slow. "I've been hard, cruel hard, all these years!" she repeated to herself. "But I'll make up for it, if the Lord'll only give me time. I'll—" Her foot went splash in something wet, and pulling herself up suddenly, she discovered that she had almost walked into the foul, stagnant pool which poisoned the air round about "Sharker's Rents." Skirting its black, slimy edges, she came to the first of the four or five tumbledown tenements which were known by this name. The door of the first one had rotted away from its hinges, and lay partly blocking up the entrance; within, all was dark. But as she listened, she heard faint, human sounds proceeding from the interior, and as she stepped across the partial barricade, a voice from out the obscurity enquired:

"Who's there?"

"It's me," she answered in trembling tones, "it's me, Priscilla!" as she groped her way across the uneven floor towards the corner from whence the sound came.

"Then you have come," came in a husky whisper from the man who lay on a heap of rubbish. "I've been lying here listening and listening, and praying that you would," and a skeleton-like hand was stretched out and grasped her own in a fierce clutch.

"It's about the boy—I'd never have troubled you about myself—but he's the last of seven, and I couldn't die in peace with the thought of him being left to starve—though God knows he's used to it—but you won't let him do that? Say you won't!" and the voice came in agonised gasps. "He's only a little chap, and you'd never miss it. I'll never be able to lie quiet in my grave if—"

"Oh, Dick! Don't ye talk so!" cried Miss Priscilla, in a choking voice. "I'll be a mother to him, that I will; only try and get well, and I'll take care of you both, and you shall have the best of everything. The Lord forgive me for my wicked thoughts all these many years!"

"Bless you, bless you!" murmured the

dying man; "but it's too late for me—it's the hard life and the starvation and the exposure of the last six months as has done for me, and I couldn't swallow now if I tried, though I would have asked you for a morsel this morning, only you spoke so fierce and looked so hard; but it's not too late for the boy, for I've often gone without so that he might have a bite."

"Oh, Dick, Dick! You'll break my heart. You as were the best-looking and the cleverest young fellow in the village! That you should have come to this, and me left comfortably off and living in my own house! Oh, never, never will I forgive myself!"

"God bless you, Priscilla! You're a good woman, though you did speak a bit rough-like this morning; but I behaved like a scoundrel to you, though I never forgot you, never, and never had a happy day after I left you. She wasn't a bad wife, Priscilla," speaking with painful eagerness, "and she had a hard life of it for years before she died, for I sunk lower and lower—but I shall die easy now that I've seen you once more; and I know you'll be good to the boy, though he is her child. Say you forgive me, Priscilla, for I'm going fast!"

Miss Pritchett was down on her knees beside her old sweetheart, wiping his clammy forehead with her shawl, and sobbing incoherent words of grief and affection, such as none could have believed possible who had not heard her. Then, as she felt the hand that had held hers so convulsively relax, and the breath come faint and fluttering, she whispered in his ear:

"Good-bye, Dick—good-bye!"

And the dying man heard her voice before his soul took flight, and replied with a flash of the lightning that comes before death, and with his thoughts wandering back to his old sweethearts days:

"Good-bye, 'Cilly! You'll meet me at the stile, to-morrow!"

A group of labourers who passed Sharker's Rents on their way to work in the fields, in the very early morning, were sorely amazed at the sight which met their eyes on passing an open doorway. For, seated beside a heap of straw, on which lay the dead body of a man—whose ragged garments showed the extremity of destitution—was that equally feared and detested Miss Priscilla Pritchett, that cantankerous old maid whose name was synonymous with all that was odious and

disagreeable! Her hand still reated on the coarse sacking, which was his only coverlet, and, at her feet, a little ragged urchin lay curled up asleep.

But what tongue can tell of the astonishment which prevailed when it became generally known that she had taken the "beggar's brat" home to live with her, or of the utter stupefaction in which the general astonishment culminated on the day when she provided a feast, and threw open the gate of her apple orchard to all the boys in the village?

#### PLYMOUTH AND DEVONPORT.

SAILING along the Channel, where there is little but the name to distinguish it from a broad and stormy ocean, as the wild Atlantic billows come rolling in fresh, and green, and seething, you see the white-sailed ships making towards a wall of bleak and rugged cliffs, fringed with cruel surf, as if they were intent on wreck and destruction. Then the dark headlands part asunder, and a lovely bay is revealed, bordered with green hills and woods that feather down to the water's edge; while grim forts with black and wicked-looking guns eye you from the heights around, and peer from the batteries on the white breakwater that stretches across the bay.

All this opens out to view as you round the Mewstone, a huge rock that rises like some shaggy sea-monster from the waves, all dripping with the green seas that break against its hoary sides. With a stiffish breeze and a strong tide sweeping in, all may be rough-and-tumble outside; but, as we shoot past the grand breakwater, about whose outer face the billows are foaming, a pleasing calm succeeds. The pleasant haven opens forth with reaches that stretch out, as it seems, into the very bosom of the land. Far and near are ships at anchor or in motion; fishing-boats shake out their brown sails; a wreath of tumultuous vapour darts out from the black sides of some huge ironclad, and thundering echoes are repeated from one hillside to another. Great ocean steamers, too, lie in the roadstead, some clustered over with a swarm of emigrants for the New World, while the "*jölel*" of the Switzer sounds across the water, or the bluff Teuton sings a farewell song of his fatherland. Or, perhaps, it is some great steamship from Africa, fresh from the

land of gold and ivory, her funnels hissing forth white steam and her sides trembling with restrained force, as mails and passengers are hurried ashore, ere she passes on her course once more up-channel.

It is a rendezvous of nations, too, this great haven of Plymouth, and foreign flags are fluttering in company with our famous old "Jack." Now it is a German gunboat that pops in for a morning call, or again, a French cruiser, or a ponderous Italian war-ship. And to the sights and sounds of all these, you may add the rustle of the waters, the clanking of anchor-chains, the cheery yeave-ho of the sailors, or the measured beat of oars, as some man-o'-war's boat flashes past, with stout arms at the thwart and gold lace at the stern; to say nothing of the white-winged yachts and pleasure-boats that dart in and out of creeks and inlets like so many midges dancing in the sunshine. And where the hills are not crowned with trees they are covered with the blue roofs and white stone walls of houses, with towers and spires here and there. And yonder is the green Hoe, and there the citadel, with its scarps and zigzags, and the black guns showing their muzzles over the ramparts.

Besides the creeks and inlets, five rivers of more or less renown join their waters in the Bay, or Sound, and carry the adventurous skiff into the very heart of the fair Devonshire land. There is the Yealme, first of all, that has cut out a fine ravine right under Wembury Head, where the Mewstone rises from the waters like a guardian lion; and then in the Haven itself, we have the Cattewater, which forms a considerable haven in itself, where fleets have often lain at anchor, the Cattewater being the estuary of that so-called river Plym, which is said to give its name to town and bay. Thus Drayton in the "Polyolbion"—

And Plym that claims by right  
The christening of that bay that bears thy noble  
name.  
Upon the British coast what ship yet ever came,  
That not of Plymouth hears, where those brave  
navies lie,  
From cannon's thundering throats that all the world  
defy?

Then, on the other side of the Sound, where Drake's Island mounts guard over the entrance, we have the Hamoaze, from which open out the docks and basins of the Royal Naval Yard, and which is formed by the rivers Tavy

and Tamar—the latter long the boundary stream between the Saxon and Celtic lands—and by the Lynher, a Cornish stream, whose creeks run up to ancient St. Germans, with its old Norman towers.

It is a fair surmise that the prefix Plym, or Plymp, survives from some ancient Celtic name, once belonging to the bay, the number five being represented in Welsh and Cornish by "pum" or "pymp," the name of the river "Plym" having been acquired in days comparatively modern. Thus we have Plympton close by—but not exactly on the River Plym—an ancient stannary town, with traditional franchises which, to use the current expression, are lost in the mists of antiquity. There is Plymstock, too, in the same neighbourhood, but still far enough from the river, an ancient village, in whose vicinity, at Mount Batten, a find of early Celtic coinage has been made. Hereabouts, too, passes the Ridgway, an ancient British and Roman road. And in the same neighbourhood, above Oreston—famous for its quarries, from which was taken much of the stone that forms the breakwater—rises Fort Stamford, one of the chain of forts built in 1864, to protect Plymouth and its dockyards on the landward side. In building this fort was discovered a Romano-British cemetery—a fact which indicates the existence of considerable settlement in the neighbourhood; to which the ancient distich also testifies:

Plympton was a borough town  
When Plymouth was a fuzzy down.

Nor are there wanting more doubtful traditions ascribing a mystic antiquity to the famous Haven and the settlements on its banks. Here may have landed Brute and the Trojan heroes. And the green turf of Plymouth Hoe was long ago scored with the outline of two huge figures, which are said to have commemorated a wrestling-match between the giant Gogmagog and Corinæus, the Cornish hero, the blood of the former, who was vanquished in the strife, having given its characteristic colour to the red sandstone rocks in the vicinity.

Scandinavian pirates from the Baltic, who swarmed on the opposite coast of France, and formed settlements there even during the period of Roman dominion, must have often visited this noble fiord, and formed villages and stockades on its innumerable inlets; and these may have left traces here and there in the names of places, strangely intermingled with those of Celtic origin. But when we first hear

of Plymouth in reliable records, it is called Tamarworth—a name which might have fairly been adopted for the new dockyard town, which bears the less characteristic name of Devonport. And, then, in Norman records it figures as Sutton—with manors respectively belonging to the Priors of Plympton Priory and to the Vallrots, a proud Norman family, allied by marriage to the Plantagenets. Some kind of a seafaring and fishing town survived this double patronage, and Plymouth had its Mayor, and its Merchant Guild, and some form of municipal government, long before its formal incorporation by charter, A.D. 1439. Yet it was an open town, without walls or defences; and, as the Haven became a rendezvous for the growing naval power of England, the town experienced, many a time and oft, the reprisals of exasperated foes.

From the commencement of the long wars of the Plantagenets waged to increase or preserve their dominions on the other side of the Channel, Plymouth was often concerned in gathering and fitting out the royal fleets. In 1287 a great armada of three hundred and twenty-five ships, under Edmund Duke of Lancaster, sailed for Guienne, as to which the King of France had made some injurious pretensions, and from soon after this time the growing importance of Plymouth is shown by its sending deputies to Parliament. Then, in 1339, the French attacked the town, burnt and plundered a good part of it, and sailed away. In return for this Plymouth cheerfully furnished twenty-six ships and three hundred and three men for that siege of Calais, which is chiefly memorable to us in connection with the citizens in the shirts with ropes round their necks, who offered themselves to King Edward's vengeance. A few years later the French were at Plymouth again, burning and destroying, and then making off. And then, in 1355, Plymouth became the rendezvous of the Black Prince's fleet both before and after the Battle of Poictiers. And here he landed after that famous victory, amidst the joyous acclamations of the inhabitants, with the French King as prisoner and his ships laden with spoil.

In 1399 the French were at it again, and repulsed for a time; yet in the following year James de Bourbon, sailing towards Wales with a powerful fleet, for the assistance of Owen Glyndwr, touched at Plymouth and destroyed and burnt part of the town. A few years after, the

Sieur Duchastel of Bretagne, with a kind of privateer fleet—France and England being nominally at peace—landed his crews of mingled Normans and Bretons, recruited from all the ports along the coast, and burnt six hundred houses. From this calamity Plymouth recovered but slowly, so that while up to this time the town had been rich and flourishing from its foreign trade, we find that some years after, the town sought a reduction of its fee farm rent due to Plympton Priory on account of its “povertie and decaye.” The memory of this disastrous invasion was long preserved in the name of Breton Side given to the part of the town that suffered most, a name which lasted even to our own era of municipal improvements.

Not that Plymouth suffered such indignity without reprisals; for one Will Wilford, a Plymouth sea-captain, fitted out an expedition which “repaid the monsieurs in their own coyn.” More effectual protection was afforded by the establishment of a regular Channel fleet in 1442, composed of eight ships with a hundred and fifty men in each, which were told off to patrol the Channel and overawe the privateering gentry from the opposite coast. This wise provision was probably due to the counsels of good Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, and it probably ceased with his fall, when all care for the safety of the coast was abandoned. With the Wars of the Roses we have King-maker Warwick landing at Plymouth, though some accounts say Dartmouth, with a handful of French soldiers lent him by the wily King Louis the Eleventh, and with him his son-in-law, the Duke of Clarence. From Plymouth he began his triumphal march, the men of the West flocking in numbers to his standard; and in the following year Margaret of Anjou, coming to share the crown of her restored consort, was met two days later by the fatal news of the defeat and death of Warwick on Barnet field, and departed from Plymouth to meet defeat and final ruin at Tewkesbury.

With the following century the curtain rises upon a new world, opening fields of enterprise unimagined in their wildest dreams by the ancient worthies of the merchant guild of Plymouth. The seamen of the West shared in most of the enterprising voyages of the period. Sailors from Plymouth accompanied Sebastian Cabot, and in 1530 we hear of old Will Hawkins, the father of the famous

Sir John, who sails in the “Paul of Plymouth” for the Brazils. There were no more barren adventures in plundering Norman villages, or burning Breton haystacks. A world of golden promise lay in the pathway of the setting sun, with easy wealth as the reward of the adventurous daring and desperate courage that characterised these dashing sea-rovers.

Forth they sail for the stormy Western main, gay and confident, as for a bridal. The townsfolk are all gathered on the Hoe, that famous height that overlooks the Sound; the ships luff up to give and receive a last farewell. Trumpets sound from the decks, salvoes of artillery, while the music from the town sounds its fanfare on the breeze, and the ordnance on the shore replies to the salvoes from the ships, while the merry bells ring out, and the joyous turmoil, with the shouting of the people, sounds far off as the ships disappear into the sunset glow, sailing away “with the fayre evening and silence of the night.”

And if the departure is joyous, with all kinds of peril and danger in prospect, judge what the return must be, say, when Drake comes sailing into port with a fair wind and flowing sail. One quiet Sunday afternoon, when all the people are in church, Drake comes in sight, hailing from Nombre di Dios, with Spanish gold in the lockers. The news flies like wild-fire. It reaches the solemn parish church, where the people are quietly praying, and away they go at the word, leaving the parson in his desk, who follows, too, no doubt, with his cassock under his arm, away to the Hoe, there to shout their welcome to brave Drake and his convoy.

It is with the accession of Elizabeth that the golden age began of the seamen of the West. The Queen loved her dashing rover, and the more stately captains of gentle blood, of whom Plymouth can display a famous bede roll. There were Sir Thomas Stukely, for Florida; Sir Richard Grenville, for Virginia; Sir Humphrey Gilbert, for Newfoundland; Sir Martyn Frobisher and Master Davies, for the North-West Passage; and the brilliant Sir Walter Raleigh, for Guiana. All gallant gentlemen and good seamen; but the greatest of them all was Francis Drake, who sailed forth in the “Pelican,” for his famous voyage round the world.

Close upon three years after, the “Pelican” lay once more in harbour, her voyage safely accomplished, and loaded

with golden spoil. Then she sailed round to Deptford, and Elizabeth came on board, feasted gaily with her captain, and dubbed him Sir Francis as she rose from the table.

And then we have the historic scene of the Armada—the English fleet lying all ready for sea, in Cattewater, and Drake and his gallant captains playing bowls on the green Hoe above. And, as Macaulay tells :

It was about the glorious close of a warm summer's day.  
There came a gallant merchant ship full sail to Plymouth Bay.

It was the twentieth of July, 1588, and the news she brought was that the Armada was in the Channel.

"There is time to finish the rub and beat the Spaniards after," quoth Drake, according to the traditional account, which few have the hardihood to dispute. And as the great Spanish fleet came in sight, sailing in stately order, in the form of a crescent athwart the tide, the English ships sallied out, and then began a running fight that lasted till Don Spaniard, grievously mauled and crippled, came to an anchor off the Flemish coast.

The anniversary of the dispersal and destruction of the Armada was long the subject of a special celebration in Plymouth, the Mayor and notables marching in procession to church for a thanksgiving service, while the bells rang and the people made holiday. This function lasted for at least two centuries after the event.

Eight years after the Armada there were mustered in Plymouth Haven the fleet and army—one hundred and seventy ships and fifteen thousand men, under Essex—which dealt Elizabeth's return blow against Spain, and effected the capture of Cadiz.

But the glory of the age had departed, when the two veteran captains Hawkins and Drake departed on their last expedition for the Spanish main. Victory was not longer at their beck and call; failure succeeded to mischance, and the old vikings sang their death-songs and departed to the Valhalla of the brave, finding each a sailor's grave in the stormy seas.

With the end of the sixteenth century and the departure of its heroes from the scene, the adventurous seaman, freebooter, buccaneer, and what not, began to show as a less worthy object. There was no longer much patriotic or sectarian fervour about the business, and the exploits of those

who followed it had a perilous smack of piracy about them. But legitimate commerce increased, and in 1606 a Plymouth Company was chartered, for settling that part of America which was then known under the general name of Virginia, but which we now call New England. Then the "May Flower" sailed from Plymouth, A.D. 1620, and her colonists founded the New Plymouth, which looks over to the Old across thousands of miles of stormy seas.

There was a considerable flavour of Puritanism about the old as well the new Plymouth. During the civil war Plymouth went firmly and solidly for the Parliament. Its old walls were repaired and new outworks were hastily constructed, and Plymouth stood out stoutly against the King's army, which was compelled eventually to raise the siege.

With the Restoration came war with the Dutch, and De Ruyter was off the coast with the Dutch fleet threatening the scanty naval preparations in the Haven, but drawing off without molesting Plymouth. Indeed, such naval power as we then possessed was concentrated chiefly about the Thames, and the western ports were left to shift for themselves, as in the naval manoeuvres of 1888, when Plymouth was pretty much at the mercy of a fortunately imaginary foe.

With its strong Puritan element, there was little doubt as to the side Plymouth would take when William of Orange landed at Torbay. Plymouth was the first English town to declare for his cause, and after landing the Prince, the fleet came round to Plymouth and wintered in the Cattewater; and once firmly seated on the throne, King William began to form the great naval establishments which have since been so largely developed.

Up to this time there had been no great resources for building and refitting ships of war at Plymouth. There was a dockyard on a small scale for repairing ships in Cattewater, and in the harbour of Plymouth properly so called, which still bears the name of Sutton Pool, from the ancient name of the manor, there was a row of storehouses and a victualling office, which is still in existence, and serves as a dépôt for emigrants.

But William's surveyors saw the capabilities of the fine inlet called the Hamoaze, and on its shores docks were excavated and naval buildings raised, although for a long time the dockyard workmen lived

either in Plymouth town or in hulks on the river. But presently a town began to rise upon the hills above the banks of Hamoaze, which for long was known only as the "Dock," but which in 1824 assumed the name of Devonport.

A splendid deep-water channel leads between two projecting points into the Hamoaze, but to reach it ships must sweep round the strongly-armed Drake's Island, and, swept as it is by batteries on every side, it would be impossible to force a passage without first destroying the protecting forts.

The peninsula between Plymouth and Devonport is divided by a considerable channel called Stonehouse Pool, on the shores of which a couple of centuries ago stood a solitary house of stone, from which the neighbourhood took its name. And here, in connection with the splendid Victualling Office which crowns the point with its handsome façade, has arisen a third town called Stonehouse. The three towns are united by tramways and bridges, and might almost be considered as one; but they differ strongly in characteristics, Plymouth being exclusively commercial, a seaport town full of vigour and enterprise, with a strong municipal organisation, while the other two are almost entirely dependent on the Government works and vast naval establishments. Rivalling the Hoe of Plymouth in its fine prospects over land and sea, Devonport has its "Mount Wise," the head-quarters of naval and military administration.

The rising naval dockyards were seriously threatened in 1779, when a combined French and Spanish fleet held the Channel and threatened a descent on Plymouth. There was, no doubt, a serious design to destroy both Portsmouth and Plymouth, but stormy winds, which have so often befriended old Albion, prevented any execution of the project. The danger, however, gave rise to the formation of a volunteer corps raised in the same year at Plymouth; and from that time till the end of the great French war, numerous corps of volunteers were organised. There were the Prince of Wales's Regiment, the Plymouth Blues, the Dockyard battalions, and other corps.

The scare of 1779 also gave rise to a pleasant little farce, for which Charles Dibdin wrote the music, and which was produced at Covent Garden in the same year, under the title of "Plymouth in Danger," which, although not rich in local

allusions, gives one a lively idea of the streets of old Portsmouth.

"Streets!" cries Ben, the comic sailor. "They're more like alleys. What a plague do they make them so narrow for? There's no such thing as walking in them without one's so sober one's not fit to be seen."

And the besetting failing of the jolly, drinking, fighting tar of those days is indicated in a song by the same Ben:

When Boatswain pipes to meals or prayers,  
We tip the leisure jog;  
But fly like tigers, cats, or bears,  
When call'd all hands to grog.

The revolution worked by steam in naval matters was met at Plymouth by the creation of a new steam-yard at Keyham, just to the north of the old naval docks. This was opened in 1853—not by Her Majesty herself, but by her representative, the line-of-battle ship "Queen," of one hundred and sixteen guns, which was taken in all standing, the sailors manning the yards, and cheering lustily.

For the safety of this grand naval dépôt, which offers almost insurmountable obstacles to an attack from the seaward side, the Commission of 1860 recommended the construction of a chain of forts on the landward side to guard against a surprise from that quarter, the then existing defences being of a trivial character. These forts have long been completed, and, when properly armed, will provide a sufficient defence for the three towns against any attack from an army in the field.

Although Plymouth Sound was, in many respects, an admirable natural haven, yet it lay exposed to gales from the southward, and to the terrible swell that beat up from the Atlantic. Even the open roadstead of Torbay was thought a safer station for the fleet, although Lord Howe prophesied that it would, one day, prove the grave of the British fleet. Men-of-war, entering the Sound, then anchored in Cawsand Bay, on the west side of the Haven, under Mount Edgcumbe, whose beautiful woods and noble glades are the greatest ornament of the view. But this was a dangerous anchorage when the gale veered to the eastward.

As to the sea that was sometimes running in Plymouth Haven, we may judge from the fate of the "Dutton," A.D. 1796, a fine East Indiaman, that was driven on shore just under the Citadel, her fate being watched by thousands from the shore and from the Hoe above. There is a graphic print of the period, which many must have

seen, showing the great ship dismasted and beating upon the rocks, the green seas washing over her deck and spouting through her portholes, while on the poop, and clinging to the rigging, are seen the forms of despairing men and women. The "Dutton" had four hundred soldiers on board, as well as ordinary passengers; but happily, by the courage and devotion of a few, communication was established by means of ropes, with the shore, along which the passengers were dragged in improvised cradles, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen who were drowned in the surf, all were rescued from the battered wreck.

Soon after this casualty the scheme was mooted for a breakwater, to stretch across the centre of the Haven, where a convenient shoal existed as a foundation for the structure—if structure it can be called—the breakwater being, in fact, just a long heap of stones dropped into the water. But it has admirably answered its purpose since its completion in 1841, and has sustained no serious damage even from the most furious storms. It cost a million and a half, and never was money better spent, for it has rendered Plymouth Sound one of the best and safest harbours in the world.

There are many other points of interest in connection with the fine old port and stirring town of Plymouth, whose narrow streets have given place to broad and pleasant thoroughfares, and which boasts of municipal buildings and thriving institutions of the handsomest and most modern type. But as to all this, information can be sought in Mr. Worth's pleasant and profitable "History of Plymouth," from which many of the incidents mentioned in this paper have been drawn.

As to the actual Dockyard, it has of late been confined to the building of gun-boats of the sea-bird nomenclature. But in the proposed additions to our line of fighting-ships, no doubt the magnificent and costly establishment of Devonport will take its fair share; and with the splendid seafaring population of all the neighbouring coast, should need arise, there is no doubt that Plymouth could furnish men as well as ships. It used to be so in old times, when a popular commander, such as Cochrane, could go ashore in Sutton Pool, and man his ship in a few hours. And, if the need arises, there is no doubt that the seamen o' the West will show themselves again, as their fathers were, among the bravest defenders of the brave old flag.

## BROWNIE'S PLOT.

A SERIAL STORY.

By the Author of "*Lucy Carter*."

### CHAPTER XXVI. CONCLUSION.

DID any one ever before look forward to a birthday as Brownie had looked forward to hers? And now that it had come, a great joy had come with it. Some unpleasantness also; witness Mrs. Northcott's reproachful face at the breakfast-table.

Six o'clock arrived, but not Mr. Litton, yet Brownie felt no uneasiness at his absence. She had held an interview with Mr. Vaile, and, after listening to his expostulations, obtained the wherewithal to meet the cheque which was already drawn upon Sir Edward Spearing and Company for eight hundred and forty pounds sterling.

Dinner-time found the small party complete. Mr. Litton sat at the foot of the table, opposite to the hostess, looking as important as though the whole house belonged to him.

Evening clothes did not exhibit Mr. Litton to advantage, and this evening he had donned them in haste. His cravat was crumpled; his chin looked more blue, his eyes more red, his teeth more black, than usual.

Henry Grayscn sat next to Brownie, and on the left of Mrs. Northcott.

"So you are going to astonish us all, Margaret," said Mr. Butterworth, for Brownie had made no secret of the evening's entertainment.

"I think we are," was her answer, given in quiet tones, strangely in contrast with her flushed face and very bright eyes. "Uncle Walter is to be the magician to-night, you know."

"Then you have had a cold shoulder turned to you, Anderson?" said Mr. Vaile.

"Most can raise the flower now, for all have got the seed," whispered Lady Spearing. "The old story, Mr. Anderson."

"I don't think you will say that the seed has fallen upon stony ground," said Brownie; while Mr. Litton's voice made itself heard from the other end of the table.

"It is marvellous—upon my word—astonishing; I think I can do just what I like with Margaret."

"I cannot say I approve of it, Henry," said Mrs. Northcott; nor did Grayson approve of it, either.

"I can't see any good in this hypnotism," he was remarking. "If it could take the place of the ordinary anaesthetics, or be employed for the detection of crime, now. But I understand it to be good for neither of these purposes, Anderson?"

"So far as my experience goes, you are perfectly correct," was the response. "You must suggest the idea; but directly the suggestion is made, action follows, with or without the will of the person hypnotised."

"Well, well," said the Rector, "I am sure it is very kind of Margaret to take so much trouble for our amusement."

"We hope to afford you a little instruction as well," she answered, with a poor attempt at a smile; for, as the fateful hour drew near, her anxiety was becoming well-nigh insupportable.

Mrs. Northcott gave the signal, and the ladies rose to leave the room.

"Only one cigarette," Brownie whispered, as she passed Mr. Litton; and, accordingly, he soon followed her to the drawing-room.

It was the first dinner-party at Eastwood since Mr. Northcott's death, and the conversation naturally turned to their old friend and to Clement.

"I begin to think your office will prove a sinecure, after all, Henry," said Mr. Butterworth.

"I never thought otherwise," was the confident answer. "There could not have been a more convincing array of evidence. There is only another month, and then the whole thing may be forgotten."

When they entered the drawing-room they found Mr. Litton in animated conversation with Maud and Brownie.

"Mr. Anderson," exclaimed the latter, "here is Mr. Litton insisting that I shall be mesmerised first."

"He only needs persuasion; he cannot refuse to gratify on your birthday."

"Oh, no, I don't," was Mr. Litton's answer. "I want to see some one else play the fool first. 'Place aux dames,' you know."

But at last he gave way to Brownie's persistence. Meantime, Anderson was calling Maud's attention to her cousin's excited demeanour. He expected a mere fiasco; he intended to do his best to assist her; but feeling confident of failure, he pitied this too-hopeful girl from the bottom of his heart.

The chairs were all placed close against the wall, with the exception of one which stood beside a small Sutherland table in

the middle of the room. Upon this chair Mr. Litton took his seat.

"Surely something must come of all this," said Maud, who had just returned to the room after a brief absence.

"Yes; probably brain fever to your cousin," was Anderson's reply.

"Clement is here," she whispered. "Whatever shall we do with him if it fails? I hope mother will not interfere."

Before commencing operations, he said a few words in a low tone to Mr. Vaile, who carelessly took up his position next to the hostess.

"Is this a birthday present, Margaret?" asked Mr. Litton, as Anderson came towards him. "Very pretty; do to keep all the love-letters, eh?"

He referred to a small writing desk which was standing upon the table by his side.

Anderson produced a glass ball, brightly polished, and of the size of an ordinary marble. Mr. Litton at once turned his mind to the business of the evening, letting his eyes converge upon the glistening ball.

He sat bolt upright, seeming to grow rapidly more and more rigid, like a man being turned into stone. His jaw slightly dropped; little by little the eyelids fell, until you would have been certain they were entirely closed. The colour forsook his fat cheeks, leaving them livid, as though from instinctive fear of his danger. Brownie, standing apart from the rest, looked like a runner awaiting the signal to commence a race.

The spectators seemed to be fascinated; not a sound was heard except the regular tick-tick of the clock on the mantelpiece. Maud stood at the door like a sentry; Mr. Vaile did not remove his eyes from Mrs. Northcott.

Anderson slipped the glass ball into his pocket, and prepared to make a few passes before Mr. Litton's face, and now Brownie realised that the important moment had almost come.

Her determination seemed to forsake her, and she feared lest she should lose her senses just when she so greatly needed their entire possession.

But the thought of Clement waiting, actually within the house, waiting to be called in and congratulated, brought her renewed strength; and, as soon as the signal was given, she was ready to do her part.

Quick as thought she drew from her pocket a black silk scarf, with its ends knotted together. In an instant she had thrown it round the neck of the uncon-

scious Mr. Litton, and placed his right arm within it. The small table was wheeled in front of him; pens, ink, and two blank cheques were placed ready to his hand, whilst the guests looked on with constantly increasing wonder.

A single interruption—an exclamation of disapproval might have aroused Mr. Litton, and spoiled all Brownie's plans. Mr. Vaile began to see daylight; Mrs. Northcott was his old friend and his respected client, but his sympathies were at present with Brownie.

You could hear Maud's ring tapping against the door-handle as she held it in her trembling hand. Anderson looked at Brownie with unfeigned admiration. This method of procedure had not occurred to him. Brownie strove to speak; but, at first, the words refused to come at her bidding.

Four minutes had gone, seeming to her like a lifetime. Again she attempted utterance, and now with better success.

"This is a cheque," she said, thrusting a pen into Mr. Litton's left hand; "you are to sign it with the name of John Northcott."

Henry Grayson began to think he had spoken too soon. He might be called upon to exercise his judicial function, after all.

Mrs. Northcott would assuredly have risen, but for Mr. Vaile's restraining hand.

Sir Edward Spearing was a strong man, not given to sentiment; but a great lump rose in his throat, nevertheless.

They all awaited the result of Brownie's trembling words with painful and highly-strung anxiety. She had herself taken a pen, and as she put it to the paper, Mr. Litton—his right arm securely resting in the sling—wrote with his left hand, and with perfect ease, the name of John Northcott at the bottom of the blank cheque.

Suddenly Mrs. Northcott's voice rang through the room:

"Walter! Walter!"

She had not even yet grasped the entire situation; but she saw that some trick was being played upon her brother.

Mr. Litton started violently, dropped the pen, and slowly opened his eyes.

"Well, what have I been up to this time?" he exclaimed, with a yawn, as though he had just awakened from a deep sleep. "Made a fool of myself, eh? Any more racing, Anderson? Who's won, eh?"

The grave faces around the room seemed to startle him, and looking down, his eyes fell upon the sling. Tugging at it violently, he turned as grey as ashes, and started up.

"Some cursed trick!" he cried. "Mary, you have let them fool me. Anderson, I owe you one for this. What does it mean? Margaret, what have you been doing?"

Stepping towards the table, she pointed to the cheque which he had just signed with his late brother-in-law's name, whilst Anderson whispered to Sir Edward Spearing, whose wife was holding a smelling-bottle under Mrs. Northcott's nose.

"You have shown us how you committed the forgery last May," said Spearing. "With your right arm rendered useless, you took the pen in your left and readily wrote Mr. Northcott's signature. I am a magistrate. It is in my power to order you into custody. Unless you at once make a full confession I shall do so."

By this time Mrs. Northcott had recovered consciousness, while Brownie looked as though she would lose hers at any moment.

"Walter, Walter," pleaded his sister, "say something; surely there is something you can say. You were always unfortunate, but never—never wicked, nor, as I knew, left-handed."

As a fact, she had known very little indeed of her brother. He had arrived in England last May with his pockets empty, but with his brain full of all kinds of schemes for their replenishment. A more successful rogue than himself had enabled him to present a tolerable appearance at Eastwood; and this man, whose acquaintance had been made on the voyage, had actually visited him at Middleton some months before. It was after the second fracture of his arm, ten years ago, that he had taught himself to write with his left hand; since then he had practised the art, until he became perfectly ambidextrous.

He had arrived at Middleton, in the first place, without any definite intention of robbing his brother-in-law. It remained a mere question of opportunity, and upon breaking his arm so soon after his arrival at Eastwood, the happy thought of the forgery had occurred to him, and proved irresistible.

But Mr. Litton's little game was now played out. He was too much of a cosmopolitan to have retained many insular prejudices; he knew when he was beaten.

As for Sir Edward Spearing, Mr. Litton knew that he was playing a game of brag. He also could play at this game; he only held one card, it was true, but that was a trump.

"Margaret," he said, "a word with you."

But before she could tear herself from her friends, the door opened, and in walked Clement. Disregarding all that had recently taken place, conscious only of the new possibilities which had opened up for himself, he walked straight towards Brownie, who timidly held out her hand to welcome him.

"I don't want you," said Mr. Litton. "You may go back to Mrs. Oliver." But, seeing that Brownie had no intention of leaving Clement's side, he thought it well to continue: "I never bear malice, Margaret. How about those shares now?"

"Here is the cheque," she answered; "but before I give it to you, you must make a full confession."

Mr. Litton did not lose a moment.

"It is a brave man's part to bow to the decree of destiny," he said, in loud, bombastic tones. "I bow to mine. I did make use of certain facilities I had acquired in another land—yes, I did certainly write poor Northcott's name. I think that is all you want?" he added, turning to Brownie.

Clement would have spoken, but she restrained him; and, pocketing the cheque as he went, Mr. Litton left the room and the house, without the loss of a moment; disdaining to cast even a single word to Mrs. Northcott.

It was while Maud led her mother away that the scene occurred to which Brownie had so confidently looked forward. Congratulations poured in upon Clement from all sides, whilst he put them lightly aside, exactly as she had foretold. Henry Grayson, alone, held aloof until he saw an opportunity of speaking to Brownie by herself.

"What have you to say to me, Margaret?" he asked, enlightened by the incidents of the evening on more points than one.

She understood him only too well.

"Only that—that I am sorry, Henry, and that I am sure you are convinced of Clement's innocence at last."

He shrugged his shoulders and went towards Mr. Vaile.

"You have seen what has taken place," he said. "The rest is for you; there is not much time to lose."

"Thank you, Grayson!" exclaimed Clement, overhearing; for a moment the two men eyed one another, then their hands met with a hearty clasp.

Everybody was ready to go now.

"We are all friends here," said Mr. Butterworth, pulling down his woollen comforter from his mouth, "you will not think that one of the oldest is taking a liberty, Clement. Remember this; your crime was committed long before the forgery of your father's name. It consisted in wasted opportunities, foolish extravagance, and, in short, in a total disregard of all that is of value on this earth. Take an old fellow's advice; don't tempt fortune again, you—you may not find an angel to save you a second time."

Clement followed his friends to the door, where Anderson was the last to bid him good-night.

Upon returning to the drawing-room he found Brownie standing with one foot on the fender, as she stared into the fire.

"Brownie," he said, taking her passive hand in his, "how can I ever thank you?"

"Please don't try, Clement," she answered, without looking at him.

"Suppose that, instead of thanking you for what you have already done, I am going to ask you to do something else—the greatest favour of all, Brownie?"

"I don't think there is anything else I can do," she said, slowly shaking her head.

"You can try to give me your love, Brownie. I am not worthy of it; but yet I ask you to give it to me."

"I cannot," she replied; then she turned and frankly met his eyes. "Oh, Clement, don't you know that it is yours already—that I gave it to you long, long ago?"

They both looked very guilty when Maud joined them, half an hour later, with a message from her mother, that Clement's room was already prepared. But it was late before he sought sleep that night.

The next two months were eventful ones to Clement Northcott. He became Henry Grayson's partner; he received his fortune of fifty thousand pounds; and then immediately relinquished his newly-acquired share in the Brick-works once more into Grayson's hands. And, last of all, one bright, sunshiny, January morning, he led the girl he loved—who had shown how well she loved him—to the altar.

It is some years since this event took place; but there is one day in Clement's calendar which his boys will never fail to celebrate. While he will always remember the fifth of November, and Brownie's success with her plot.

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